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From School to Stage

By
Phyllis Dare

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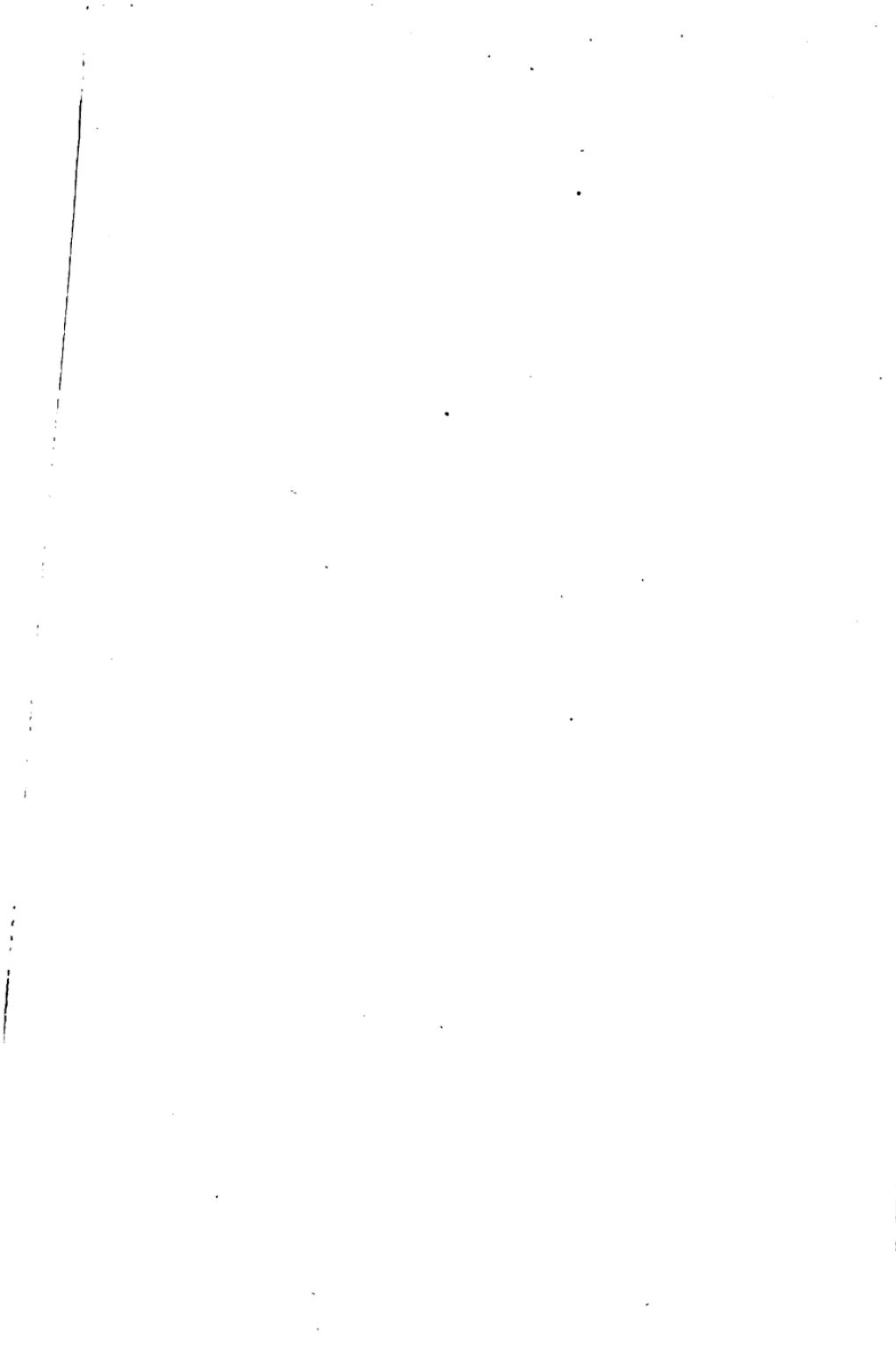


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EVERT JANSEN WENDELL
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1918





FROM SCHOOL TO STAGE

A

PUBLISHERS' NOTE

We are indebted to Messrs. FOULSHAM and BANFIELD, Limited, for the photographs facing pp. 25, 40, 57, 89, 128, and on Frontispiece; and to Messrs. BASSANO, Limited, for those facing pp. 72, 104, and on the Wrapper.





Miss Phyllis Dare "at home"

FROM SCHOOL TO STAGE

By

PHYLLIS DARE



LONDON
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PREFACE

I SINCERELY hope I shall be judged very, very leniently in this, my first effort as an authoress. In fact, it is only because I have been approached so often to write the story of my stage career that I have attempted the task at all. And I would like to say that I should surely have given it up in despair long ago had not Mr. Bernard Parsons so kindly lent me his invaluable assistance in turning a chaotic pile of notes into —well—some sort of order.

PHYLLIS DARE.

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From School to Stage

CHAPTER I.

Early Experiences

WHY so many members of the general public should take a keen interest in the career of so insignificant a person as myself I must confess I cannot understand at all, try as I will. Still—well —there it is: from time to time, during the last few years, I have received literally hundreds of letters from people I have never even heard of, asking me to write an account of my theatrical life, and, therefore, although I fear I shall

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not shine as an authoress yet, I will do my humble best, such as it is.

Truth to tell, as I take up my pen, I am not a little appalled at the difficulty of my task, for the rôle of biographer—or should I say biographeress?—is a novel one to me, and on that account I trust I shall be pardoned for countless faults in literary style and construction, and all sorts and kinds of other details which I understand are part and parcel of all literary work. Still, here goes.

I was born in London—as a fact my birthplace was Fulham Park Gardens—in August of 1890, and I can well remember that, even as a very tiny tot, I used

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to take the greatest interest in theatres, and, indeed, in public entertainments of all sorts, while sometimes at night I used to lie awake and wonder whether I ever should become an actress.

"Of course, neither of us will," my sister Zena would say as, after the lights were turned out, we used to talk in whispers of those castles in the air so dear to all children, "for it is the most difficult thing in the world to become an actress, and, besides, I don't suppose that either of us could act if ever we had the chance—which is most unlikely."

Still, somehow or other, I never quite despaired of one day realising my earliest ambition, which was to

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play the part of a glittering, gold and silver bespangled fairy—I fell in love with the Fairy Queen at Drury Lane the first time I was ever taken to a pantomime—and although my parents used to laugh at me when I expressed a hope that I might one day go on the stage, I comforted myself with the reflection that, at any rate, when I grew up I could become an actress, “because,” I said to myself, “grown-up people can always do just what they like,” which, by the way, is the greatest mistake in life, isn’t it?

Well, one day, when I was just six years old, I was asked to appear with a number of other children at a charity Masonic performance

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given at the St. James's Hall,
where I sang and danced.

Actually what I sang, how I
danced—I'm sure I showed an
utter disregard for any correct step
—I do not remember, but I still
recall the terrible state of nervous-
ness I was in when I stood with
my hand in my mother's waiting
to go on.

Even to-day that nervousness
still remains with me, especially
on first nights, when sometimes
I have felt as if I would give any-
thing in the world if only the
ground would open up and engulf
me. Believe me, stage fright is
the most horrible thing imaginable
—and, worse still, one never grows
out of it altogether, for many

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world-famous actors and actresses have since told me that they are as nervous to-day before they go on the stage as they were when mere "nobodies."

A few weeks later, to my great joy, my sister Zena and I were asked to take part in another charity fête at the Botanical Gardens, where it was our important duty to carry the national flags of Spain and America, walking the while beside a car called "Spain and America," decorated with lovely white flowers and inscribed with the legend "May Peace Prevail." You see the Spanish-American War was raging at the time, and, of course, everyone wanted peace.

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My "part" on this occasion was not, as can readily be imagined, a difficult one to play, but still I took it most seriously and, indeed, felt as if the success or failure of the fête depended on the manner in which I helped to carry that flag. Yes, I was a very earnest worker in those days, and friends of mine have told me that I looked as solemn and imposing, clutching the pole of that flag, as does the Lord Mayor's coachman when driving through the streets of London.

Despite my enthusiasm in those amateur performances my ambition to become an actress by profession did not seem any nearer realisation, until one day a friend

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of my father's suggested that he thought I could play the part of the girl babe in "The Babes in the Wood" at the Coronet Theatre. I was just nine at the time, and, therefore, after many long confabulations with managers and all sorts of people who I thought looked tremendously important, it was finally decided that I was old enough to accept the engagement.

Oh, the joy I felt when the decision was arrived at! For days before the rehearsals began I could not sleep through thinking of the big success I hoped to make, and I pictured myself holding the house spell-bound with an exhibition of acting never

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yet seen in the annals of the stage.

Truly one's childish fancies are vastly amusing, for, as a matter of fact, in that first engagement I had very little to do indeed, except "look" the part of the "girl babe" and sing a pretty duet, "The Gollywogs," with the boy babe. Still, I liked that pantomime very much, but there was one "thing" that made me very nervous, and that was the Demon King in the forest scene. I and my brother had to lie down under a tree in the woods, while lots of robin redbreasts came and covered us over with leaves to keep out the cold.

Well, when we had been lying

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there a few seconds the Demon of the Woods, who had a huge head, which was frightfully ugly, and flames of fire shooting out of his eyes, came and stood over us and wished that all sorts of horrible things might happen to us. His voice was so gruff, and altogether he looked so horrible, that I used to cling to the boy babe for protection, and then I knew I should be quite safe, for, although he was called "a babe" on the programme, he wasn't really a babe at all, but was quite big.

By the way, I should here like to try and remove some of the many erroneous impressions which are held about children and the

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stage. For instance, many people declare that life in a theatre exercises a most demoralising influence on children, and I have heard it said that laws should be passed making it illegal for young children to go on the stage until they have reached the so-called "years of discretion." It is said, too, that they are worked too hard, and that they spend the time they ought to be devoting to lessons in learning a "trade" which can be of no use to them in after life.

Now, as one of these children who went on the stage very young in life, I think I may say, without conceit, that I know something about the subject. Besides, since that first appear-

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ance, I have met hundreds and hundreds of child actors and actresses, or rather perhaps I should say would-be actors and actresses. In not a single case, however, can I truly say that I have ever known of a child deteriorating through the profession.

Of course, in some cases, life in a theatre tends to make a child somewhat precocious, but this is a fault which can easily be remedied by parents—"a word in time saves nine," eh?

As regards the contention that children who take up the stage very young must necessarily suffer from an educational point of view, I can only say that this again is a question which depends en-

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tirely on their parents, as during the daytime a child's studies can be pursued almost as regularly as if he or she, as the case may be, were not on the stage at all. Thus, in my own case, all the time I was playing in that first pantomime I used to work hard at lessons all day, so that really acting at night did not seem work at all, but came rather as a sort of playtime.

No, I am firmly convinced that if only people would show a little more common-sense with their children when they are on the stage, we should not hear so much about the so-called harm which the theatre is said to do to the rising generation.

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I hope it will not be thought that I am rather "priggish" in writing thus, but I have often felt annoyed at hearing people, who in reality know little about life on the stage, running down "the profession" as if a theatre were the most injurious place in the world in which to let a child appear. Nor must it be forgotten that child actors and actresses are often the sole bread-winners of the family, and I have known many cases in which boys and girls of under eleven have kept their parents from starvation.

One case in particular I shall never forget. In a certain pantomime in which I was playing—I will not mention the name lest

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the heroine of my story should chance to read these lines—there was just the sweetest little girl I have ever seen—she was only nine, and was so pretty—playing the part of the Queen of the Fairies. She looked radiantly happy on the stage, but “off” she always looked, oh, so sad!

One night I found her standing all alone “in the wings,” sobbing as if her very heart would break. Of course I tried to comfort her and asked her what was the matter. “Oh,” she said, “mother is so ill, and we have no money except what I earn, and the doctor says that unless she goes to a warm seaside place at once, she will die.”

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At this moment the call-boy's voice rang out "Fairies, please," and in two minutes that plucky little child was beaming and smiling before the audience, looking the very personification of happiness; but I knew that really she was absolutely and hopelessly, entirely wretched. As she left the stage a bouquet of lovely flowers was handed to her which must have cost quite five pounds I am sure.

"If only," the little Fairy said to me afterwards, "people would send useful things instead of flowers and silly toys, what a lot I could do to help mother!"

Well, the next night the brave little Fairy told me her mother

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was still no better. "Plenty of food, nourishing food, she must have," was the doctor's verdict, "and only that and a holiday in Bournemouth will save her life."

And on that night again the little Fairy received still another huge bouquet from some would-be kind member of the audience. "I shall pray when I get home to-night," the child said gravely, as she gazed at the lovely flowers, "that grown-up people may grow more sensible and send me something really useful to help mother."

Now what do you think happened?

The very next afternoon, almost as if sent in answer to her prayer,

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a great big hamper arrived at the stage-door addressed to my little Fairy. We at once opened it in the greatest state of excitement, she and I, and inside, most daintily packed, our astonished gaze saw two lovely chickens, several nourishing jellies, and beef-tea galore—the very things, in fact, which the doctor had said would save my little Fairy's mother's life. But who sent the hamper we could never find out. Anyway it must have been somebody who understood that child actresses sometimes have lots of responsibilities.

If only happenings in life ended up so happily as do most plays, what a cheery world it would

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be! But in this case, fortunately, there was a happy ending, for, with these luxuries, her mother quickly commenced to recover.

But when I think of that tiny, plucky little girl of nine, laughing and dancing before a crowded house at a time when she almost felt as if her heart would break, I often wonder whether theatrical audiences ever realise, as they see children dancing and smiling before them, that very often these apparently exuberantly happy little Christmas Fairies have really big worries—much bigger worries in fact than many grown-up people have to bear.

Yes, indeed, those who have not had practical experience of

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life on the stage often hold very, very mistaken ideas about its so-called joys. They little think that a merry, laughing face often hides an aching heart—but it does.



CHAPTER II.

My First Real Chance Some Provincial Experiences

My first real chance of making a name for myself on the stage occurred just before I was ten years old, when, owing to the sudden illness of Miss Beatrice Terry, I was chosen to take her place and play the part of Little Christina in that sweetly pretty play, "Ib and Little Christina." Mr. Martin Harvey played Ib, and the cast throughout was an excellent one, for Miss Eva Moore,

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Miss Marie Rorke, Mr. Holbrook Blinn, Mr. Charles Landor, and Master Vivian Thomas were all members of the company.

The piece was a great success, and thanks to the personal interest which a number of the leading actors and actresses took in me, perhaps on account of my tender years, I learned a lot which proved of the greatest assistance to me in my profession.

Indeed, Christina is quite one of my favourite parts, and altogether I just loved the piece. I expect everyone knows that in a theatre it is against the rules to stand "in the wings," but now and again I was allowed to do so, and I used to enjoy those

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occasions very much, but the play was so sad that sometimes I cried quietly by myself, furtively wiping away my tears for fear of their running down my cheeks and making my "make up" look blotchy.

Even in those days a pretty sympathetic play appealed to me more than anything else. I don't know whether you remember the story or not, but it seemed such a pity that poor Ib, after saving up his money to buy a bracelet for Christina, whom he was going to marry, should suddenly be told that Christina loved someone else, and no longer cared for him.

Martin Harvey, when he wrapped up the precious bracelet

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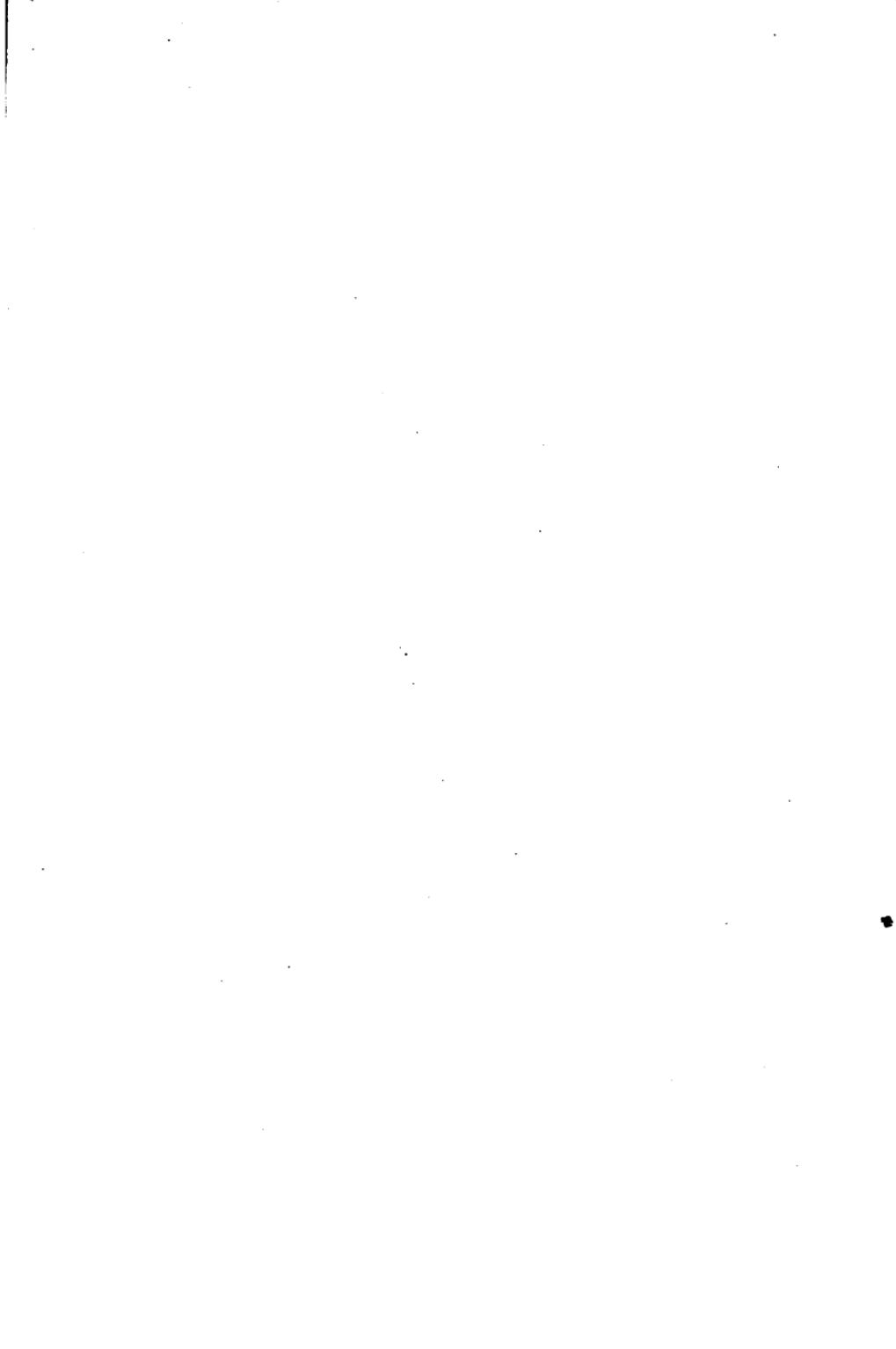
in paper and packed it away carefully in a drawer, looked so frightfully unhappy that I am sure everyone in the audience felt just as sorry for him as I did; but still, things were not quite so bad at the end, and in the last scene, when I went on, affairs were in a much more cheerful state, and Ib looked quite happy once again.

By the way, it was when playing the part of Christina that I first received a letter from some member of the audience whom I had neither seen nor heard of. It was merely a little note from a girl saying that she liked my performance, but I have always kept it, for one's first message of





Miss Phyllis Dare, aged 6 years





Miss Phyllis Dare, aged 6 years

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congratulation on the stage is an important event indeed.

I well remember how carefully I folded it up and put it in my purse for fear of losing it. And to write a reply thanking the sender for her kind message was a matter which took me hours and hours, for in those early days I had no idea that letters on all sorts and kinds of subjects to actresses from perfect strangers were of the most common occurrence.

Now, however, I have become more enlightened on this subject, for sometimes by a single post I have received over a hundred photographs and postcards to sign, while if I were to answer every

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communication I receive I should have to employ about a dozen secretaries and typewriters. Truly we live and learn!

All this time I used to have a governess during the daytime, and I also studied music, dancing, and singing, so that my hours away from the theatre were fully occupied.

The work was hard, but it is a great mistake to imagine that success on the stage can possibly be attained without hard work, and although I found it rather irksome sometimes after rehearsals having to wrestle with history, geography, and mathematics, yet now I am glad that I wasn't allowed to shirk for a single min-

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ute, because a good education on the stage is absolutely imperative.

But many people seem to regard theatres as a last refuge when all attempts to succeed in other walks of life have proved failures, which probably accounts for the altogether overcrowded state of the stage at the present time.

At Christmas, 1900, I made my first appearance in the provinces at the Theatre Royal, Manchester, playing the title-rôle in the pantomime "Red Riding Hood." In every pantomime, of course, a large number of children are engaged, but it seems to have been my fate in life to be associated with those who are always

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doing or saying something quite out of the common.

Thus, in "Red Riding Hood" one day, during rehearsal, I was standing with my mother in the wings watching the stage-manager vainly trying to teach a tiny mite of seven to fly like an angel in the air, attached to a wire suspended from the top of the scenery. Try as he would, the luckless teacher utterly failed to convert his pupil into a successful angel, until at last, in desperation, he said, "Well, why don't you want to become an angel?"

"I do," replied the child, shyly looking up into his face, "but I don't want to fly in the air. I

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want to fly along the roads, 'cos it's so dull up in the sky."

Believe me, seekers after humour would frequently do well to search for it among the hundreds of children who appear annually at pantomimes.

I hope I shall be forgiven if I refer to still another child actress, of whom I entertain the liveliest recollection. You see, I suppose it is only natural that as I was a child myself at the time childish sayings and doings should make a particular impression upon me.

This young lady was ten years old, and for one so young was very ambitious. She wanted to dress herself, "make herself up,"

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and do everything without troubling the "dresser." So on the first night she escaped from her mother's usually watchful care, and, safely installed in another dressing room, proceeded to dress and "make up" her face in, as she no doubt thought, the orthodox manner.

The time soon arrived for her entrance, but no Fairy could be found. The stage-manager was, of course, frantic, and rushed wildly here and there trying to find her, and at last, in a secluded corner, he came across a rather bedraggled, dishevelled-looking child quietly munching a huge stick of chocolate.

"Hallo, what are you?" he said.

"Oh, I'm a fairy," said the

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child, still continuing contentedly to munch the chocolate, "but I've lost my way to the stage."

"A fairy?" queried the stage-manager, "by the look of you I should say you were the Demon King."

Explanations, of course, followed, and it afterwards transpired that the ambitious fairy had scorned the services of her dresser, and had both dressed and "made herself up" with the somewhat appalling result that her face looked like a sort of mixture between that of Faust at his best—or should I say worst?—and a very ruddy and particularly healthy-looking applewoman.

Some actresses I know strongly

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object to playing in pantomime, but why I cannot imagine, for I have always found pantomime artists most kind and sympathetic, and as for work—well, when it is remembered that during pantomime time there are frequently twelve performances a week, I think most people will agree with me that the artists earn their salaries to the last penny.

Some comedians, too, seem to find favour with audiences from the first moment they appear on the stage, and Mr. Dan Rolyat, with whom, by-the-by, I appeared in pantomime last Christmas, has always been a prime favourite.

Mr. Rolyat has just that particular dry sort of humour which

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invariably appeals to lovers of pantomime, and when I first heard him explain why a bull was not an animal of which to be afraid, I thought I should never stop laughing. His explanation, indeed, is one of the most humorous things I ever heard in pantomime.

"It has often struck me," he said, with that whimsically funny face of his, which is such a strange mixture of mirth and pathos, "that society does not fulfil its social obligations to the bull. Poor beast! People passing through the field in which it is quietly grazing have only to see it swish its tail to run for their lives. For some reason or other they seem to think that a

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bull that swishes its tail is a ferocious bird—I mean beast—and, in consequence, the bull seldom has any male or female friends to help him while away his hours of leisure. It is so stupid of people to be afraid of a bull that swishes its tail. Only a few months ago when I was in Devonshire I saw a bull swishing its tail, and I decided at once to cleverly put an end to the animal's praiseworthy desire to work overtime for no pay in this manner —by tying a lump of lead to the end of its caudal appendage. *My wife brought me flowers to the hospital every Sunday.*"

Droll, quiet humour of this sort always seems to appeal to

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provincial audiences, and, strange though it may seem, very often humour which appeals to London audiences falls quite flat in the provinces, and vice versa. But my pen is running away with me—for which I humbly apologise.

Since that first appearance outside London I have frequently played in the provinces, and I must confess that, personally speaking, I have invariably found provincial audiences just too sweet for words. Still, I now know many actors and actresses who have the strongest objection to leaving London if they can possibly help it. Why I simply cannot understand; but I suppose it is only natural that different

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people should have different likes and dislikes.

Of course, to those who are playing leading parts, leaving home and London either to tour from week to week or to appear for any length of time in the provinces does not mean any particular hardship, but, on the other hand, "professionals" who are only playing "thinking parts" which do not carry with them very generous remuneration find it very difficult sometimes to procure comfortable diggings at the modest rental they can afford.

I remember, for instance, an actress who appeared at Manchester in my first pantomime telling me that she was unwise enough

FROM SCHOOL TO STAGE

to engage rooms by letter without first seeing them, as the wording of the advertisement, "replete with every home comfort," sounded alluring in the extreme to "a stranger in the land." On her arrival, however, she found that the much-vaunted "home comforts" of the bedroom merely consisted of a broken-down bedstead, a very rickety and none too cleanly wash-hand stand, and a cane chair the bottom of which was a veritable object-lesson in ventilation, while the panes of the windows were all broken, letting in the wind and the rain in quite a wholesale manner.

On remonstrating with her landlady, who was most indignant

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at being told that the rooms were quite uninhabitable, she received an injured reply to the effect that these particular rooms had been patronised by all the leading actors and actresses in England for many years past, "and," added the untruthful hostess, "Sir 'Enry Irving told me 'imself that 'e 'ad never slept in such nice airy apartments."

Airy apartments, forsooth!—well, seemingly some provincial land-ladies are not far behind Ananias from the standpoint of untruthfulness.

Fortunately my lot in life on the stage has, perhaps, run smoothly, for I have never

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felt any of the inconveniences I have described, but this particular anecdote has always impressed itself upon me, as it occurred the first time I had ever left my home, and one's first experiences away from home, I think, always stand out clearly, don't you?

By-the-by, it was in "Red Riding Hood" that I first received an anonymous present from a stranger in the audience.

It consisted of a box of particularly nasty chocolates, but to me, in my childish delight at what I considered unexampled kindness, the chocolates seemed the nicest ever made. I regret to say that I and two other

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children finished the whole lot in less than half an hour. But "it's an ill wind that blows no one any good"—the local doctor benefited by my indiscretion.

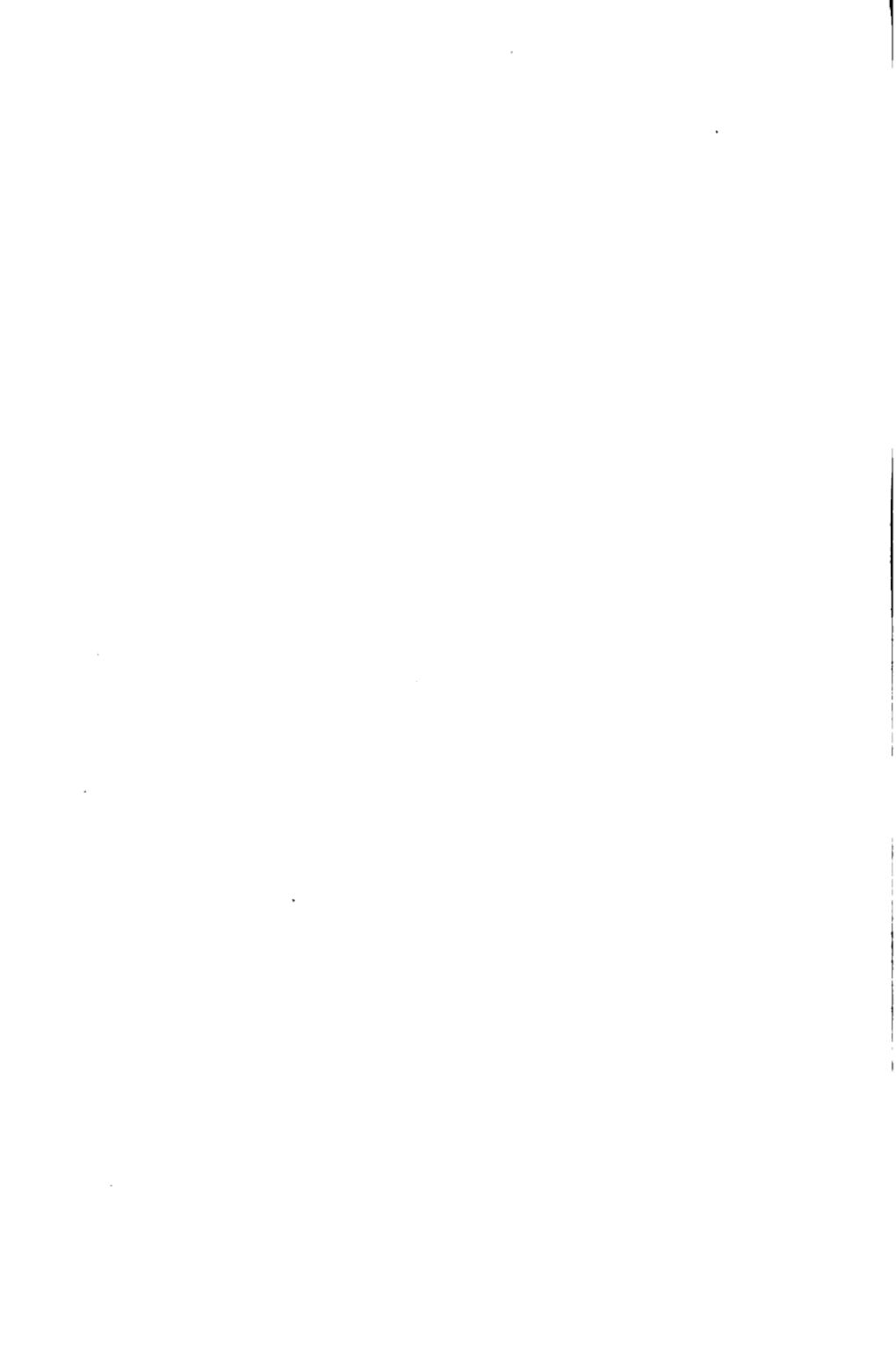




Miss Phyllis Dare, aged 10 years



Miss Phyllis Dare, aged 10 years



CHAPTER III.

**I play at the St. James's with
Mr. George Alexander
A Period of Real Hard Work
My First Admirer**

AFTER coming back from my first pantomime I returned to school, and for two whole months without interruption of any sort I studied the usual lessons a child has to learn, whilst in addition I daily practised singing and dancing and elocution. So that, at all events, even when I was

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very young, I cannot be accused of having led an idle life.

Ever since my first appearance on the stage I always cherished a secret ambition to play at the St. James's Theatre with Mr. George Alexander, who I thought was quite the most wonderful actor the world had ever seen.

So, when in April of 1901 I was offered an engagement to appear with Mr. George Alexander in "The Wilderness," I almost went mad with joy, for, in my wildest dreams, I had never imagined that such good fortune would fall to my lot for years and years.

I played the part of one of the two children in Mr. Haddon

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Chambers's popular piece, and here again I met Miss Eva Moore and Master Vivian Thomas, while I should also like to mention that delightful actress Miss Le Thiere, who was most tremendously kind to me, and helped me in a thousand and one ways.

By the way, I wonder if people not actually members of the theatrical profession ever realise how frightfully hard an actor-manager has to work? In most cases he carries about three parts of the play on his own shoulders, while he has not only to study his own part but he also has to contend with the troubles incidental to stage-management and general supervision, so that his

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position is altogether different from that of a man who has merely to perform his part as written by the author.

On the first night of "The Wilderness," youngster as I was, I could not help admiring the extraordinary manner in which Mr. Alexander seemed to keep personal control of every little detail behind the scenes. Just before he went on I was standing in the passage close to the wings all alone when Mr. Alexander passed, and although he must have been frightfully preoccupied and worried he still found time to stop and speak to poor insignificant me.

"Now, little lady," he said kindly,

FROM SCHOOL TO STAGE

as he leant down and put his hand on my shoulder, "you must not look so worried, for there's nothing for you to be nervous about."

"But aren't you nervous?" I asked, for he seemed to have such a lot to do, and everybody seemed to be coming to him for help and encouragement.

A half smile came over his face and he said very quietly, "Well, now I come to think of it, perhaps I am—just a little."

"Then you mustn't be," I replied, meaning to try and cheer him up, which of course was very silly of me, for how could anything a little girl like me said help anybody?—"for you have

FROM SCHOOL TO STAGE

got nothing to be nervous about, for I know the piece will be a success."

I don't know whether it was the utter incongruity of a mere nobody like myself trying to smooth over for him the worries of a first night, but anyway Mr. Alexander picked me up and kissed me just as if I had been his own little girl, saying, oh! so kindly, "Thank you, little woman, you've done me a lot of good."

I never felt so proud in my life before, and when I heard my cue to go on the stage I did not feel the tiniest bit in the world afraid. If only managers could realise the amount of encouragement given by a few

FROM SCHOOL TO STAGE

words of sympathy from them they would—well, never forget to give them.

After playing in “The Wilderness” for several months, in December of 1901 I went to the Vaudeville under the management of Messrs. Gatti.

The kindness of Mr. Stephano Gatti I shall always bear in mind with the deepest sense of gratitude, but we were to meet later—so more of that anon.

I had quite a small part in the play, which was that enormous success “Blue Bell in Fairyland,” as I was cast as one of Miss Ellaline Terriss’s little sisters. However, although I never played the part, I was honoured by being

FROM SCHOOL TO STAGE

chosen as Miss Terriss's understudy.

During the run of this play I think perhaps I went through one of the hardest times of my life, for it was so popular that matinees were general, and I had a certain Swiss governess part of whose duty it was to take me to and from the theatre. Not content with my ordinary lessons, my governess used to seize every opportunity of driving a little knowledge of some sort or other into me, and so, whether we journeyed by train or 'bus, she was always making me learn something.

It appears, too, that my doctor—I'll never forgive that doctor—

FROM SCHOOL TO STAGE

had told her I was to take walking exercise and get as much air as possible. The result was that between the performances I was nearly walked to a shadow, while, all the time, the good fräulein endeavoured to impart words of wisdom to me at about the same speed as the famous motorist, Mr. Warwick J. Wright, goes round the racing track at Brooklands when he puts on "the top speed" on his six-cylinder Minerva.

No, I don't think any child has worked quite so hard as I did at this time. Morning, noon, and night I was hard at it, and when I was not poring over ordinary lessons, I was either studying singing and dancing or being

FROM SCHOOL TO STAGE

"trained to a shadow" by a protracted course of walking by that Swiss governess, who, if she had been a racehorse, would surely have won the Gold Cup at Ascot, for she literally "stayed for ever"—and she didn't stay too long in the same place either.

Still, all the same, I was quite fond of her, as she was always kind, thoughtful, and patient with me. Now I believe she is married. It would be interesting to hear what her husband thinks of walking exercise. He should be an authority on the subject, anyway.

There are people who will tell you that actors and actresses rarely, if ever, really enjoy themselves on

FROM SCHOOL TO STAGE

the stage—that is to say, get genuine amusement out of their part—but, believe me, they are wrong, for in “Blue Bell” I believe that Miss Ellaline Terriss thoroughly enjoyed the games we used to have in the garret where we were supposed to live, especially when we all fed the thin cat who jumped through the window.

Yes, those were very happy days despite all the hard work, and the time passed extraordinarily quickly.

After the expiration of the run of “Blue Bell,” I continued my studies until the next Christmas, when I returned to my old and first theatre, the Coronet, where I played Sesame in “The Forty Thieves.”

FROM SCHOOL TO STAGE

I don't know that I can remember anything particularly exciting happening during this engagement, except that one evening I received a most amusing letter from a schoolboy who evidently was under the impression that, in figuring in a piece with a title of "The Forty Thieves," I was running a grave danger of mixing with unwholesome company. He wrote to me as follows:—

' Dear Miss Phyllis Dare,—
' Please excuse the liberty I take
' in writing to you, when I have
' not had the honour of being
' introduced to you. Still, as we
' are just about the same age,
' you will doubtless understand
' that my motives are to defend

FROM SCHOOL TO STAGE

'you, and to warn you that being
'mixed up with such rascals as
'forty thieves will not do you
'any good. I feel sure that you
'are the sweetest child in the
'world, and therefore I hope you
'will not remain in this company
'any longer. My master at school
'—I am very advanced for my
'years—tells me that English men
'and women can always get pro-
'tection from the police, and so
'I hope you will get some
'officers from Scotland Yard to
'watch after you while you remain
'with the "The Forty Thieves."
'Once again apologising for my
'boldness in writing to you,
'Yours, etc.—'

Evidently this youthful admirer

FROM SCHOOL TO STAGE

was a very earnest theatre-goer indeed, and perhaps it is as well that no murders were committed in this pantomime, otherwise he might have endeavoured to start an uproar in the theatre.

After leaving the Coronet Theatre I took a long rest, and as my "walking" governess left me to go to Switzerland to "take unto herself a husband," I once again returned to school, and for a whole year studied hard. Indeed, I almost began to forget the time when I was an actress, for "make-up," rehearsals, stage dresses, and so on and so forth seemed but dreams of the dim, dim past.

All this long time of rest I

FROM SCHOOL TO STAGE

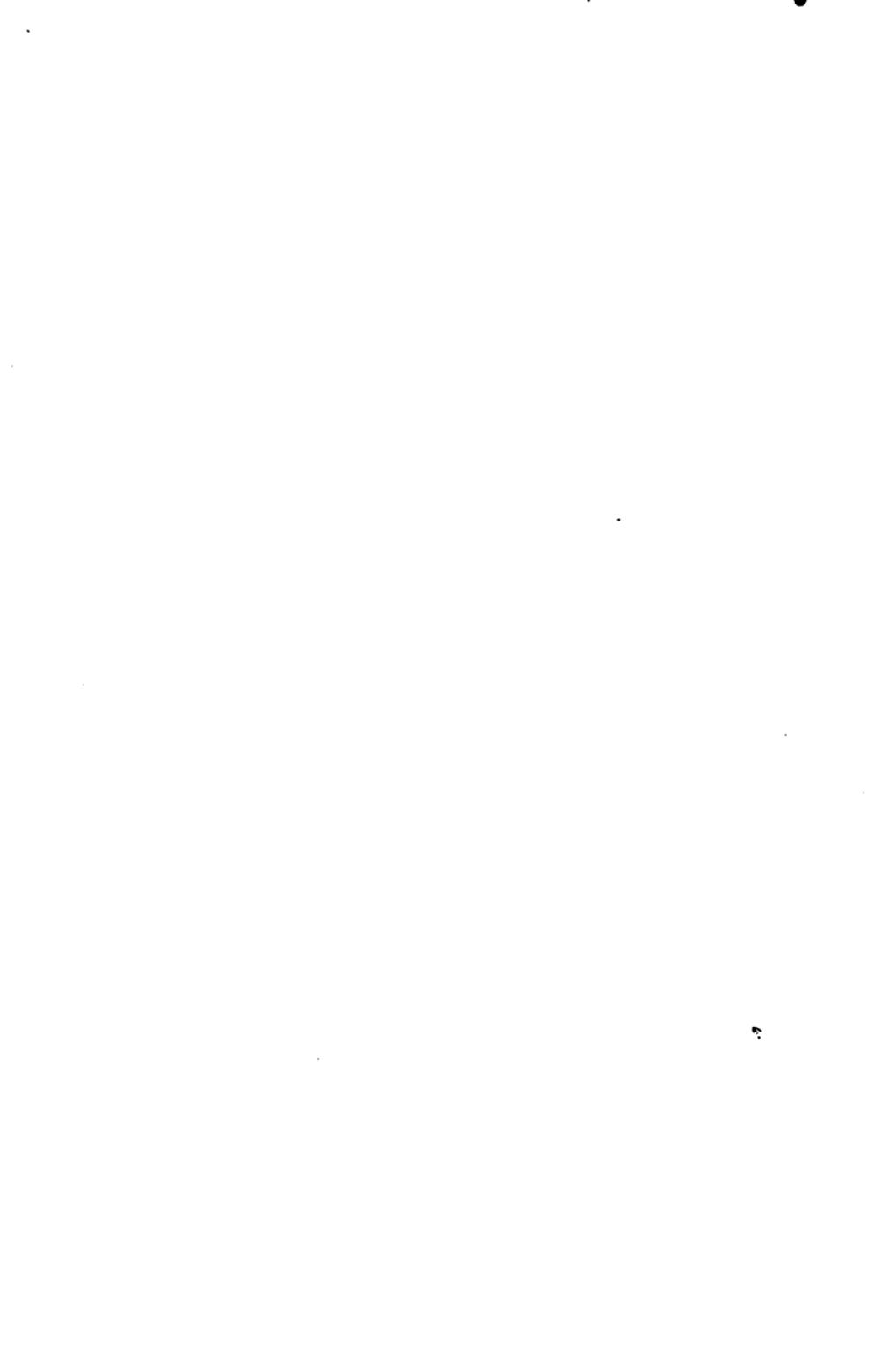
worked most conscientiously, for I had become deeply interested in the stage as a profession, and fortunately realised that I should never prove competent to play really important parts when I grew up unless I had gone through the usual "drudgery" lessons.

It was just about this time, however, that the picture postcard craze, which has now grown to such an enormous extent, was beginning to become popular, and I can well remember how jealous my school friends were whenever I was sent any postcards to sign. A little later on I should like to tell you some of the peculiarities of the picture postcard craze, for

FROM SCHOOL TO STAGE

by this time I may claim to be rather an authority on the subject, having probably, during the last three years, signed anything from seventy-five thousand to one hundred thousand postcards.

By the way, when first I used to receive postcards to sign, I invariably took the messages written thereon most seriously, and so one morning, when I found a postcard addressed to me on which was written, "I fell in love with you the first time I ever saw you, and shall determine to win you by fair means or foul," I almost fainted with fright. Indeed, for weeks, as I daily wended my way to school, I almost avoided walking on the





Miss Phyllis Dare and her sister Zena

FROM SCHOOL TO STAGE

pavement lest this horrible person should pounce out from some alley or area and carry me off.

Fortunately, however, the letters I have received from unknown admirers have not always been of this alarming character, as will be seen by a few extracts I will give from my letter-bag, into which, from time to time, some extraordinary communications have found their way. Certainly, truth is stranger than fiction when applied to the letters an actress receives.



CHAPTER IV.

Some Love Letters I Have Received. A Curious Request.

AFTER appearing at the Theatre Royal, Birmingham, in "The Babes in the Wood" (this time as the "Boy Babe"), I returned to school again, but fate apparently had decreed that my studies should be interrupted at frequent intervals, for in September of 1905 I had offered to me such a good part that—well, none of us like to refuse really good things, do we? so it was

FROM SCHOOL TO STAGE

accepted for me at once. And, strange to relate, this chance came to me simply by a lucky fluke.

My sister Zena, who had created the part of the Duchess of St. Jermyns' in "The Catch of the Season," and had played it some months, was forced to relinquish the part on account of having to fulfil a previous contract elsewhere; so, for a time, Miss Ellaline Terriss (Mrs. Seymour Hicks) played the part of the Duchess.

But unfortunately, shortly after she had taken up the part, Miss Terriss turned ill and had to have a long rest, so I was then engaged as the new Angela by Mr. Stephano Gatti.

FROM SCHOOL TO STAGE

I was only just fifteen at the time, and when I heard that I had been selected to play so important a part I almost fainted with fright, for I never imagined for a moment that with my limited experience I could make a success of a part which everyone was talking about. Yet, somehow or other, things worked out all right, and everyone connected with the theatre treated me with the greatest kindness and sympathy.

But as long as I live I shall never forget the terrible nervousness I felt on the first night. Only once since then have I been seized with such an attack of the "shivers," and that was when I returned from Brussels to play

FROM SCHOOL TO STAGE

Miss Edna May's part in "The Belle of Mayfair" a year or so later.

I often wonder whether an audience has any idea of the sensations an actress sometimes goes through on a first night. I don't suppose that one person in a thousand really understands what an ordeal it is, especially to a girl who has just left school, and it may, therefore, be interesting if I describe exactly how I felt the first time I played Angela.

As I walked up the narrow passage leading to the stage door I noticed a long queue of people waiting for admittance, while outside in the Strand rows and

FROM SCHOOL TO STAGE

rows were lining up near the early doors. Just for a moment I almost turned round and ran away.

Oh, to hide myself where no one could possibly find me! I thought, as my heart beat like a sledge-hammer until, indeed, I fancied people must have heard its thuds. Then, all of a sudden, I realised what a horrible coward I should be if I were to run away. After all, the worst I could possibly do would be to make a huge failure—and lots of actresses far more talented than I have failed on innumerable occasions. So I just set my teeth, and as I passed through the stage door I made a mental resolve to make a success that night.

FROM SCHOOL TO STAGE

In my dressing-room, on the table, was a great pile of telegrams wishing me luck, and this fact did not tend to lessen my nervousness, as it drew my attention to the widespread interest taken in my appearance. Still, there was nothing to do but to make the best of things, so I busied myself in "making up."

Suddenly, just as I was putting the finishing touches to the plain grey dress I wore in the first act, I heard the call-boy's shrill voice outside my door calling out in high-pitched tones, "Miss Phyllis Dare, please!" For a moment that unnerved me, but my dresser's kindly "Good luck,

FROM SCHOOL TO STAGE

Miss," as I left the room, cheered me up quite a lot.

Once again setting my teeth, I walked down to the stage to await my cue. As I stood by the draughty wings I happened to get a glance at the front of the house. Through a sort of mist I saw a great sea of faces looking expectantly for my appearance. It was too terrible! I felt quite unstrung to think that so many people were waiting to see me. Unconsciously I clutched the scenery as if for support.

"I can't go on! I can't go on!" I said to myself as, with closed fist, I tightly gripped one of my gloves. "Why should I, fresh from

FROM SCHOOL TO STAGE

school, be subjected to an ordeal of this sort?"

I seemed to be shaking all over. I heard my cue, and realised that perhaps the most important moment of my life had arrived. Should I be tried and found wanting? With my heart literally in my mouth, and feeling the most insignificant person in the world, I went on the stage—and then, at last, I forgot that I was Phyllis Dare. My nervousness vanished; I was not myself any more, I was just Angela.

During the run of "The Catch of the Season," everyone was tremendously kind to me, the press, the public, and members

FROM SCHOOL TO STAGE

of the company alike, while, for the first time in my life, I received whole batches of letters from admirers in the audience, several of which were so amusing that I have hunted them out to give some idea of the sort of communications an actress sometimes receives from absolute strangers.

There is, for instance, something peculiarly business-like about the following epistle:—

‘Mr. — presents his compliments to Miss Phyllis Dare, ‘and wishes to make to her ‘parents the following proposal, ‘which could be carried out ‘through a firm of solicitors.

‘For the present, Mr. — must

FROM SCHOOL TO STAGE

'remain anonymous, until, indeed,
'the offer is either accepted or
'refused. He desires to adopt
'Miss Phyllis Dare, and to bring
'her up as if she were his own
'child. He is a widower, and
'having no children of his own,
'it has been his lifelong ambition
'to have the care of a child
'whom he could bring up as if
'she were his own.

'Mr. —— has no heir, and
'therefore, on his death, Miss
'Phyllis Dare would succeed to
'his property, which includes a
'town house in —— Square, and
'a large country residence in
'Somersetshire. Mr. ——'s income
'exceeds £15,000 a year, proof
'of which will be given by his

FROM SCHOOL TO STAGE

'solicitors. This offer is a perfectly genuine one, and is only made because Mr. —— is so impressed by Miss Phyllis Dare's great cleverness and striking beauty. At present, of course, her character has yet to be formed, but Mr. —— assures her parents that she will have, under his care, the best education that money can buy.

'The reply to this letter must be sent to Mr. ——'s Solicitors, 'Messrs. ——, Lincoln's Inn, W.C.'

'Dear Miss Dare' (ran another letter I received when playing in "The Catch of the Season") — 'Every night for the past three weeks I have taken the same seat in the front row of the

FROM SCHOOL TO STAGE

'stalls at the Vaudeville Theatre
'in the vain endeavour that you
'might notice me and give me
'some sign that you were pleased
'to see me.

'Your coolness towards me,
'however, drives me to despera-
'tion, and, unless I hear from
'you within the next twenty-four
'hours, I shall do something des-
'perate. My intentions towards
'you are perfectly honourable, and
'I say here — and you can sue
'me for breach of promise if you
'like—that I would marry you
'to-morrow if you would only
'have me. Were such a happy
'consummation to come to pass I
'would only make one stipulation
'—that we spend our honeymoon

FROM SCHOOL TO STAGE

'in a balloon. Silence on your
'part will prove to me conclusively
'that my suit is a hopeless one,
'and if I do not receive a reply to
'this letter at once, you will neither
'see nor hear from me again.

'What my fate will be is my
'secret, but I may say that in
'any case I shall not go big
'game hunting. That way of
'trying to seek forgetfulness is
'played out. Once more let me
'say I love you—nay, worship
'you to distraction. Yours for
'ever—'

Sometimes, however, the letters I receive make me quite sad, and the following was so pathetic that a great lump rose in my throat as I read it.

FROM SCHOOL TO STAGE

'Dere Miss — every nite I
'sees you go to the stage dore
'of the theater, and O i do look
'forward orl day to the evenin'
'becos then i know that i shall
'see you.

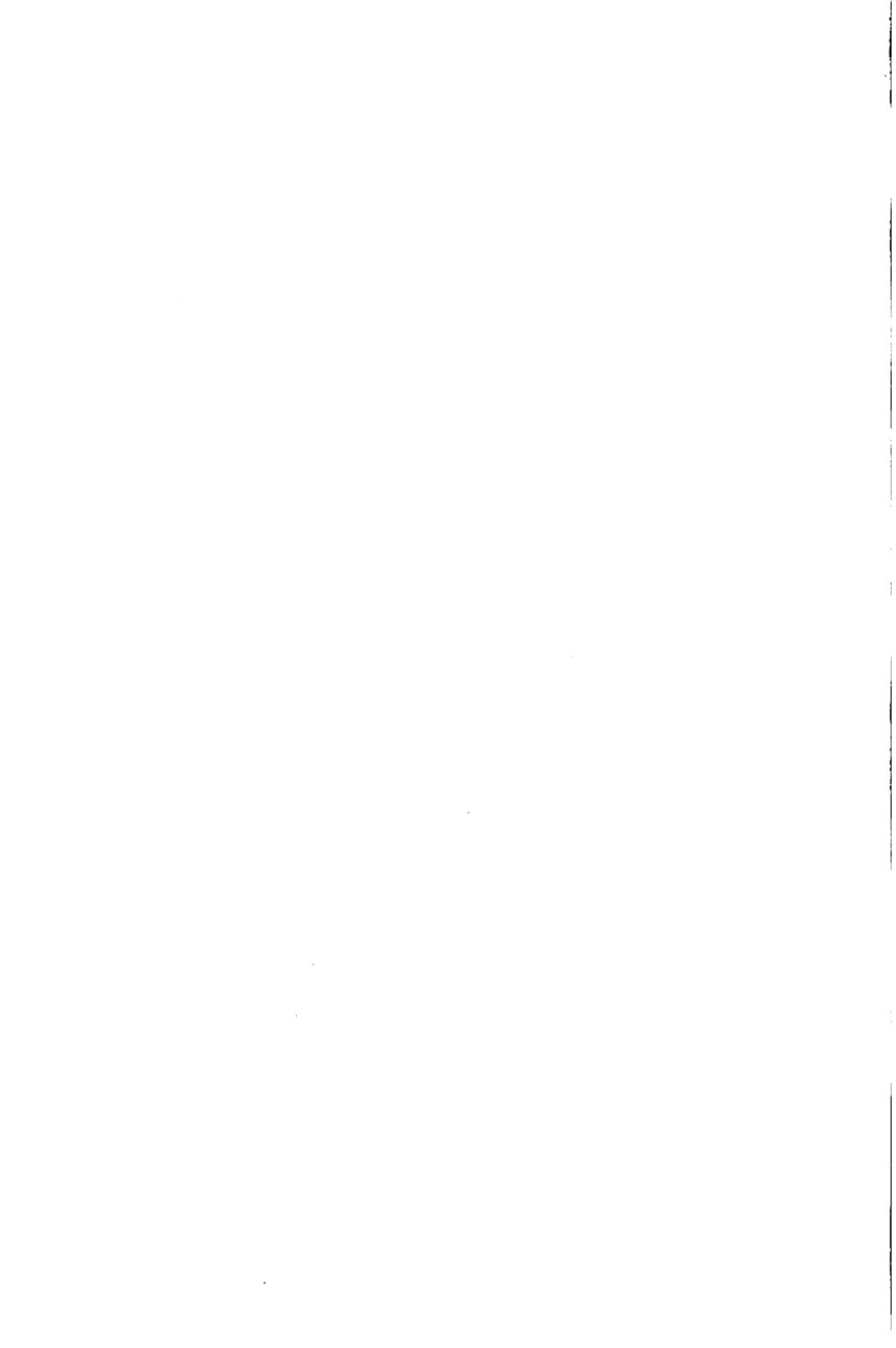
'I'm very much afeared you
'will never care to stop and
'speke to me for I'm only jest
'a littel flower boy and my close
'is raged an' my boots is torn
'an' my toes shows through the
'leather so i'm not fit to speke
'to any lady like yerself. i
'aven't told no one that i'm
'ritin' to you becos I know that
'a durty littel flower boy ain't
'got no call to rite to a bewtiful
'littel lady like you is plese miss.
'But you do look so kind an'

FROM SCHOOL TO STAGE

'good an' one wet evenin' tho' i
'don't suppose you remembers it,
'you gave me a penny as you
'past. O miss i do so wish
'i could grow up a gentelman
'like them toffs as gets out of
'their motor carts and karriages
'drest in fur coats every nite.
'if only i was like them miss i
'wouldn't 'esitate one second, but
'would jest arsk yer strait out
'to share my 'ome wif me. But
'it's no good, i ain't your class,
'but miss i'd like yer to know
'that if ever you 'ave need of a
'friend you can relie on your
'faithful servant even tho' 'e is
'drest in raggs an' generaly
'sleeps on a bed of straw.
 'Wiv my best respecks miss



Miss Phyllis Dare as Angela in "The Catch of the Season"



FROM SCHOOL TO STAGE

'an' 'opin' you won't be ofended
'like at my rudeness in ritin'
'you as I don't know an' 'opin'
'you'll allus 'ave good 'ealth as i
'opes to enjoy. Yours very
'respeckful——'

Yes, all of a sudden, I seemed to have been considered to have quite grown an important person by a large number of theatre-goers, for, in addition to letters, affectionate and otherwise, when I was playing Angela at the Vaudeville, I used to receive communications asking my advice, from perfect strangers, on all sorts of curious subjects.

How strange it is that people should be addicted to this sort of thing!—but there it is. And I

FROM SCHOOL TO STAGE

suppose, until the end of all time, people who are more or less well known on the stage will be "bombarded" in this sort of way. But why a girl of fifteen's advice on, "Do you think blue taffeta would make me a pretty bathing dress?" from "Troubled Tessie," should be sought I cannot, for the life of me, understand.

Sometimes, however, I have received letters full of real pathos, and I must confess that when I read the following, just before I was going on the stage one evening, I felt so sad that I could scarcely get through my part.

'Sweet little Phyllis Dare——
'I'm going to ask you a great

FROM SCHOOL TO STAGE

'favour—to get your father and
'mother to allow me to take you
'out to tea one afternoon. A
'long time ago, I once had a
'little daughter, but she was taken
'away from me when my wife ran
'away, and last night when I saw
'you come on the stage, at first I
'thought you were that little
'daughter of mine, for the like-
'ness was so extraordinary.

'I am an old man now, with
'white hair and spectacles, but I
'can remember my little seven-
'year-old daughter, just as if she
'was only taken away from me
'yesterday. Every night before
'she went to bed she was taken
'to me in my study and, as I
'kissed her, I used to say, "Good

FROM SCHOOL TO STAGE

'night, little sweetheart." It is
'all so sad, so very sad, that my
'pen shakes as I write, but I
'should like to let you know and
'your parents know too that in
'future I shall always think of
'you as "my little sweetheart."

'Perhaps, one day, your parents
'will ask me up to tea one
'afternoon, that is if you are not
'allowed to come out to tea with
'me. My love to you, little
'Phyllis. Yours affectionately—'



CHAPTER V.

My Life at School.

Impressions of a Schoolgirl Actress. The Greatest Surprise of my Theatrical Career.

I SHOULD very much have liked to play my part in "The Catch of the Season" until that most successful musical comedy came to an end at the Vaudeville; but, unfortunately, some months beforehand I had arranged to appear at Christmas at Newcastle in "Cinderella"—I was Cinderella—so early in December I gave up my part.

FROM SCHOOL TO STAGE

In the story of my life I have referred so often to pantomimes and various happenings in Christmas productions that I do not think I need refer to this particular production, except to say that it made "a big hit."

Immediately it terminated its run I was packed off to school in Brussels to finish my education, and really the sudden change from the glamour of the stage to the quiet life of a schoolgirl was one of the most curious sensations I have ever experienced. Moreover, it is questionable if, in the whole history of the stage, any leading lady has ever before found herself suddenly transformed from that proud position into a mere nobody.

FROM SCHOOL TO STAGE

Still, one gets accustomed to everything, and when I had been in Brussels for a fortnight I almost began to believe that I had never been on the stage at all—in fact, that the days of “The Catch of the Season” had never actually existed, but were just extracts from a long dream.

Everything seemed so strange. Instead of going to bed late and, I fear, getting up rather late too, in Brussels I almost rivalled the milkman for early rising. And as for going to roost at night—well, I was generally fast asleep when people in London were thinking of looking in at the theatre for an hour or so.

Every day I was called by one of

FROM SCHOOL TO STAGE

the mistresses punctually at seven, and unless I was down half an hour later to breakfast—a cup of weak coffee and a roll—I knew full well that I should suffer all sorts of terrible punishments, such as detention, and other dread penalties which the fertile brain of a schoolmistress evolves so skilfully.

After breakfast I had to go upstairs again and make my own bed just as if I was an ordinary domestic servant, while, at eight o'clock to the tick, the day's regular lessons began, and for two hours I pored laboriously over irregular French verbs (which, I am afraid, I made more irregular than ever), decimal fractions, and hosts of other things which, truth

FROM SCHOOL TO STAGE

to tell, I did not find half as interesting as—well, the dullest play.

Then came a second breakfast—this time of tartine, which, of course, as you know, means bread and butter—and very stodgy bread and butter too, every bit as thick, in fact, as the Duke of St. Jermyns' had helped me to eat a few weeks before in "The Catch of the Season."

After tartine, more lessons till midday, when for half an hour we were allowed to do just as we liked until the gong sounded for luncheon, which was really quite a red-letter incident in the day's routine, especially when mysterious rumours of chicken

FROM SCHOOL TO STAGE

and roast beef turned out to be realities.

Strange it is how quickly one gets accustomed to almost everything in life. A few weeks before I don't think I should have been stirred to any wild enthusiasm by such ordinary fare, but it is surprising what a change can come over one in a short time; and at Brussels "chicken and roast beef days" seemed to assume an air of vast importance.

Again, when I was on the stage, before I left for Brussels, I should have "jibbed" horribly if I had been told to mend table-cloths or darn stockings in my spare time, but, after a few weeks' tuition in the mysteries of "needle-

FROM SCHOOL TO STAGE

and-cotton" wielding, I found I could do all sorts of really elaborate fancy work, and one day I actually made myself a blouse.

Now, I will not go quite so far as to say that I should like to wear a blouse of my own manufacture at the Savoy or the Carlton, for I have a shrewd idea that, as with most amateur efforts, such a masterpiece would only fit where it touched—and probably it wouldn't touch very often. But at school the blouse I made was greatly admired, though whether this admiration was, to some extent, inspired by my informing the other girls that I had just received a postal order for ten shillings from home, I should not like to say.

FROM SCHOOL TO STAGE

I hope my description of my life at school is not boring, but I have so often been asked about it that I trust my sketch of a schoolgirl actress's life may interest quite a lot of people.

By the way, I think quite the worst part of a schoolgirl's day is preparation time. On the stage I always disliked rehearsals, but preparation, which, as a matter of fact, is nothing more than rehearsal of the next day's work, I found quite altogether worse. But oh! before preparation time I have forgotten to mention that in Brussels we used to have afternoon tea—not a London thin-bread-and-butter tea, but a great wodgy, six-sliced re-

FROM SCHOOL TO STAGE

past, with such weak tea that sometimes I fancied the cook must have run out of that beverage and, to get over the difficulty, used tea-leaves of considerable antiquity instead.

In London a lot of my spare time had been taken up in answering letters, and as for signing picture postcards—well, in the old days I seemed to be always doing it. But in Brussels I was only allowed to write letters on Sundays, while, better still, it was strictly against the rules for me to receive or sign picture postcards except on a certain afternoon, when I signed over three hundred because I heard that people were getting

FROM SCHOOL TO STAGE

quite indignant at not getting their postcards back.

Every Sunday morning I used to attend service at the English church and, in the afternoon, I generally went to a sacred concert in the Bois. Once or twice in the term we were allowed special treats, and one evening I was actually taken to the Opera, so that altogether the time was not quite so dull as it might have been.

Perhaps, however, of all my school experiences the strangest was to have to go to bed at half-past eight.

You see, when I was on the stage it was generally close on midnight, and sometimes even

FROM SCHOOL TO STAGE

later, before I reached home, and, often and often, after the excitement of the theatre, I used to lie awake and hear the clock strike two, three, four. But at school, punctually on the stroke of half-past eight, I used to take a candle and a box of matches and wend my way up the great, cold, bare staircase to my bedroom, and as at that early hour I often did not feel a bit sleepy, I would lie awake and wonder to myself what people in the great world outside the walls of my school were doing.

Then sometimes as the church clock struck nine I used to fancy that I was on the stage again. In my dream, I could hear the

FROM SCHOOL TO STAGE

little call-boy's shrill tone calling out "Miss Phyllis Dare, please," and I fancied that I was back at the Vaudeville once more just going on the stage to sing my duet "Suppose" with Mr. Stanley Brett.

So I used to doze and doze, and often I imagined I was a really important leading lady at some big West-end London theatre; and in my dreams I could hear the applause of the audience and the sharp tap of the conductor's baton as I was recalled for an encore. Then in my sleep I would stretch out a hand over the bed-clothes to take the bouquet which some kind member of the audience had sent





A charming study of Miss Phyllis Dare

FROM SCHOOL TO STAGE

to me, only to suddenly awake with a start to find myself a mere nobody, just an ordinary schoolgirl and not a leading lady at all.

Yes, my impressions of those days in Brussels stand out very clearly, for everything seemed so strange; but time passed really quickly. Indeed, I sometimes used to think that I should be sorry to go back again to London with its noisy crowded streets, but as events turned out my school days were to come to a sudden and dramatic ending much sooner than I had ever imagined possible.

One morning, just after I had swallowed two slices of thick

FROM SCHOOL TO STAGE

bread and butter and gulped down a cup of rather muddy coffee, my father walked quietly into the class-room, having travelled all night to get to Brussels early in the morning, and informed me, just as if it was the most natural thing in the world for a girl to leave school at an hour's notice, that I was to go upstairs at once and pack, as I must be at home the next day at all costs.

At the moment I was too astonished to ask any questions, and, as one in a dream, I packed up my plain school dresses, hurriedly collected the few knick-knacks I possessed, put everything "all anyhow" in a

FROM SCHOOL TO STAGE

small leather trunk, got two girls to help me to sit on it to strap it down, and before I had really realised what had happened, I was being driven in a ramshackle old cab to the station.

Once in the train, however, I literally aimed a volley of questions at my father. "Why am I leaving school like this?" "Why didn't you tell me you were coming over?" "What a frightfully rude girl the mistresses must have thought me!" and so on and so forth until I stopped for want of breath.

"You have been chosen to succeed Miss Edna May at the Vaudeville," said my father quietly as he handed me a thick scroll

FROM SCHOOL TO STAGE

of closely typewritten matter, "and here's your part—it's rather a long one and you have to rehearse the day after to-morrow, so there's not much time to be lost."

A long explanation as to how all this had come to pass then followed, and before we boarded the steamer I realised that the most important time in my theatrical career had arrived.

But it seemed perfectly hopeless to expect me to be able to succeed so popular and clever an actress as Miss Edna May in so short a time.

There was nothing for it, however, but to make the best of things, so wrapped in a thick

FROM SCHOOL TO STAGE

travelling rug and sitting on a comfortable lounge chair I stayed up on deck all night studying my part by the light of a flickering lantern from a cabin close at hand, realising that every throb of the engines was bringing me nearer to a truly formidable ordeal.

On my arrival home my peace of mind was not increased when, after three hours' sleep, the representatives of no less than eighteen papers called to see me between two and five o'clock in the afternoon, each one anxious to know whether I thought I should prove equal to the task of taking up so important a part at such short notice.

Every minute of the next four

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days was taken up in either rehearsing, being fitted for dresses, trying over songs, or a thousand and one other things which had to be attended to at once.

And at last the all-important night arrived. To my dying day I shall never forget it.



CHAPTER VI.

The Harm Done by Malicious Gossip about Members of the Stage.

I Take up Miss Edna May's part in
“The Belle of Mayfair”

PUBLIC interest in my appearance had probably been greatly stimulated at the time through a cruel rumour which had been circulated about me, but of which, until my return home from school, I knew absolutely nothing.

I wonder why it is that so many people take such a strange and fiendish delight in making

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up the most weird and extraordinary stories about actors and actresses? Yet, the fact is that the stage has, I believe, for years and years formed the happy hunting ground of busybodies and malicious, meddling gossipers, who aspire to "bring down" some luckless member of the profession about whom they think the story they propose to fabricate will be swallowed with avidity by the many to whom they relate the outcome of their imaginative brains.

In my own limited experience, on innumerable occasions people not connected with the stage have told me "tittle-tattle" of the most impossible description

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which I have known to be without a shadow of foundation, about actors and actresses of my acquaintance, and with such a mysterious air as if to say, "we are in the know, exclusively in the know, in theatrical circles."

By this time, experience has taught me that it is a hopelessly futile undertaking to tell purveyors of lies of this description that they are talking "mere footle," and so, although I always contradict unkind reports when they are untrue, yet I very much fear that my efforts in this direction are seldom believed.

And after all, if it pleases people to concoct "fearful and wonderful" stories about people

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on the stage whom they have never met in their lives, and indeed have only seen across the footlights, I suppose it would be unkind and selfish to wish to deprive them of their pet hobby. Still, when one remembers that these so-called "true stories" generally grow in the telling, it is a trifle rough on the subjects of their fabrications, but somehow or other we manage to live all the same.

Fortunately, the general public invariably stand by those whose reputations malicious perverters of the truth would try to drag down to the dust, and to my dying day, even if I live to be ten times the age of Methuselah, I shall never, never forget the sweet

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sympathy which was extended towards me by thousands of perfect strangers when they knew and realised that rumour had wronged me in a manner as cruel and heartless as lying tongues have probably never before so wronged an actress in the whole history of the stage.

By every post, by registered post, by messenger, by personal delivery all day long, letters arrived from people I had neither seen nor even heard of, each one containing the kindest expressions of sympathy for me at a trying period of my career. They —the writers of the letters which cheered me up so—seemed to feel that I might, perhaps, be in need

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of "a few kind hand-shakes." During one week, for instance, I received no less than three thousand letters, samples of which may be interesting, as they serve to show how the public will stand by those whom they know to have been unjustly wronged.

"Proud possessor of nine hundred and thirty-seven picture post-cards of you" sent the following poetic effusion:—

"When calumny most fiercely stings,
Let this be your consolation:
'Tis only on the sweetest things
That wasps commit their depredations."

A sixth-form boy at Eton wrote as follows:—

'My dear Miss Dare,—I feel I must write and tell you how

FROM SCHOOL TO STAGE

'much I sympathise with you,
'and how sorry I feel when I
'imagine what pain these foul
'accusations must have caused
'you; but needless pain, for every-
'one knew that they were but
'cowardly lies

'I am longing to read of your
'latest success as the Belle of
'Mayfair, for success it must be,
'and I only wish I could escape
'from school just to see you
'playing your part with the infi-
'nite grace which made you so
'endeared in the hearts of the
'British public.

'I can only say again how
'much I feel for you, and how I
'wish you every success in your
'new rôle of the Belle of May-

FROM SCHOOL TO STAGE

'fair, and close, hoping you
'will not think this a very pre-
'sumptive letter, and trusting you
'will not think me an ass for
'writing. Yours very truly, "One
'of the Eton Sixth."

'PS.—I think you are the
'sweetest girl I have ever seen,
'and if ever I hear anyone say
'a word against you, he'll get
'what Paddy gave the drum.'

A little girl, aged twelve, arrived at my house at half-past seven in the morning on the day it was announced that I was to return from the convent at Brussels, and brought the following effusive note of welcome, at the same time enclosing an example of her skill with the brush :—

FROM SCHOOL TO STAGE

‘ Dear Darling Miss Phyllis
‘ Dare,—Father told me last night
‘ that you were coming back from
‘ school to play Miss Edna May’s
‘ part in “The Belle of Mayfair.”
‘ I am a schoolgirl myself, and
‘ can understand how frightfully
‘ nervous you will be, so, to cheer
‘ you up, father is taking me for
‘ a treat to the Vaudeville on
‘ Saturday night to welcome you.
‘ I am supposed to be in bed
‘ now, but I got up early and
‘ slipped out of the house to bring
‘ you this before anyone was up.
‘ Is the enclosed picture anything
‘ like you? I painted it in my
‘ bedroom this morning before I
‘ was dressed. Yours lovingly,
‘ Molly (Irish).’

FROM SCHOOL TO STAGE

A famous judge, whose name has recently figured very prominently before the public, added his judicial quota to the flood of sympathetic letters which poured in upon me. He wrote:—

‘ Dear Miss Dare,—My wife and I wish to offer you our sincere sympathy in this shameful annoyance to which you have been subjected through the dastardly accusations circulated about you by male and female blackguards. There are always such scoundrels about, whose chief delight is to inflict pain on those who cannot defend themselves, and hardly know from which quarter they are attacked; but lately there has been an epidemic of this



Miss Phyllis Dare as the Belle of Mayfair



FROM SCHOOL TO STAGE

'cowardly anonymous libel all
'over the country, and it needs
'to be put down with a firm
'hand. Actresses, I have long
'thought, could do much good in
'this world by setting an example
'to those who come to see them.
'In this case, the trouble which
'has befallen you will only heighten
'the esteem and affection the public
'have for you, and I shudder to
'think of what would happen to
'those who have circulated the
'cruel rumours if they were turned
'loose and exposed to the tender
'mercies of *all* who have had the
'pleasure of seeing you.

'Assuring you of our heart-felt
'sympathy—my wife would have
'written only she is laid up with

FROM SCHOOL TO STAGE

'a severe cold—believe me, always
'yours sincerely——.'

Now although the huge budget of letters I received cheered me up most tremendously, yet at the same time they did not tend to decrease my nervousness, for from the moment I arrived back from school in Brussels, wherever I went, people seemed to recognise me.

In restaurants, 'buses, railways, cabs, everywhere I heard muttered whispers of "There's Phyllis Dare; I wonder what she will be like as the Belle of Mayfair?"' and so on and so forth, until really I almost began to wish that my name was Polly Jones or Sally Smith, or somebody

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whom no one knew anything about, because you see after having spent several months in quiet sleepy old Brussels where no notice was taken of one at all, it seemed so strange to find oneself transformed into a sort of "walking side-show."

Still I got used to it after a time, and indeed I was so busy learning my part all day, practising songs and dances, trying on dresses innumerable and boots and shoes galore, that really I had very little time to think of anything else except real solid downright hard work.

The night before I took up Miss May's part I scarcely slept a wink through thinking of the

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coming ordeal, and as the hour approached for me to start for the theatre I became more and more "funky," as I had heard that every seat in the house had been booked up for days. But I determined to take things as philosophically as I could, and so when I drove along the Strand and saw long lines of people stretching from the doors of the Vaudeville Theatre right down to almost as far as the eye could see, I just clenched my teeth and said nothing—though, like the sailor's parrot, I have a strong notion that I thought quite a lot.

I dressed almost as one in a dream, but all the members of

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the company were so extremely sympathetic and thoughtful that I felt that, at any rate, I carried the good wishes of the theatre with me.

At last my call arrived. For a second I stood in the wings feeling that wild horses could not induce me to go on the stage. Then, all of a sudden, the thought flashed across my brain that few actresses, so early in life, had ever had so tremendous a chance of making a name for themselves as was mine at that very moment. "So here goes," I thought, as I mentally shook hands with myself.

I stepped on to the stage. Phyllis Dare was no more: she had suddenly changed into the Belle of Mayfair.

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But the cheering! As I write in the summer-house of a shady garden at Herne Bay I still seem to hear it ringing in my ears. The crowded house seemed to be applauding as if by machinery which transformed a thousand clapping hands into one great volume of welcome. For at least three minutes I stood there waiting for the applause to subside, and during that time I learnt a lesson which I hope as long as I live I shall never forget—it was that the public will always stand by those who have been wronged. To an actress, surely, no possible thought could be more consoling.

At last, after what seemed to

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me half a lifetime condensed into a space of five minutes, silence was restored and, curiously enough, for the rest of the evening I never felt a trace of nervousness; although during the interval crowds of interviewers called to see me, hosts of telegrams from friends arrived every two minutes, and messages of congratulation were showered upon me by many kind well-wishers.

By the way, writing of well-wishers reminds me in particular of the kindest, dearest old gentleman who ever lived, Mr. Stephano Gatti. How perfectly sweet he always was to me—and to everyone else, too! Hardly a night passed during my engagement that

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I did not see him in his private box, and never once did he miss coming to say a few kind words. Now, alas! he is no more; but I, in common with all who knew him, feel deeply the loss of an ever good and kind friend.

But, to return to that fateful night, I can say truthfully that it afforded the most exciting experience I have ever had—or probably ever shall have—in the whole course of my career.

All the same, I must confess that when I went to bed that night, although everything had passed off as smoothly as possible, the last thought which occurred to me before I dropped off to sleep was, "I wish I was back

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again at school in Brussels—in that plainly furnished little bedroom in Brussels."

The strain and excitement of the evening had been almost more than I could bear.



CHAPTER VII.

The Trials of Publicity Secrets of Success on the Stage

FOR weeks after my appearance in "The Belle of Mayfair," wherever I went I felt like a freak, as so much publicity had been given to my appearance that I seemed to be recognised everywhere—even in all sorts of out-of-the-way places. One morning, for instance, after rehearsal, when I was leaving the theatre with Miss Camille Clifford to drive home to lunch, we were almost

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mobbed by a crowd of several hundred people who had collected outside the stage door and who followed us all the way down the Strand.

Still, in this world I firmly believe one can get used to anything, and after a time I hardly noticed that I was being stared at at all.

As I have said before, it seems to have been my fate to have to leave pieces before the expiration of the run, for early in December of last year I was forced to relinquish my part to fulfil a contract to appear in pantomime at Edinburgh as Cinderella. My successor was Miss Billie Burke.

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Words cannot express how sad I felt when I left London, for everyone in the theatre had been so very very kind to me that I seemed to be saying "goodbye" to a party of old friends—but all good things come to an end, and life sometimes seems to be one long series of "how do you do's?" and "goodbyes."

After pantomime, which passed off most successfully, I enjoyed quite a long rest for a whole six weeks, when I commenced a round of concerts at various towns throughout the country.

One thing in particular struck me when I was visiting a number of large provincial towns, and that was the extraordinary

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number of girls in other professions who wished to adopt the stage as a means of making a livelihood.

Thus hardly a day passed that I did not receive requests from would-be actresses—and would-be actors too—asking my advice on “how to succeed on the stage.” Now I fear the real secret of success in the theatrical profession remains yet to be discovered, but at the same time there are various hard and fast rules which at any rate are well worth bearing in mind.

The great mistake, I think, that most people make is to entertain the prevalent belief that if they fail to succeed in other

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walks of life, there always remains the stage as an infallible "fall-back." Never, however, was there a more erroneous idea, for the stage calls for the possession of certain qualities just in the same way as do all other professions.

And yet, week in and week out, managers and theatrical agents are bombarded with letters from theatrical "stars," many of whom have had absolutely no experience of the life at all, and, worse still, possess no real ability. But nothing but failure seems to convince them that they have made a serious mistake in their choice of an occupation. Seldom, indeed, is the ambitious one content to take the advice of those

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who have had practical experience of the trials and hardships which are inevitable before one can arrive within measurable distance of the top of the theatrical ladder.

Perhaps, therefore, my humble advice on "aids to success on the stage" may prove of some value to a few, at any rate, of the innumerable theatrical aspirants to fame and fortune. If such proves to be the case I shall feel that these lines have not been written in vain. Would that I could be of service to the many hardworking, conscientious members, and would-be members, of the profession who are struggling to win a name for themselves.

In the first place, "personality,"

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an almost indescribable quality, is situated very near indeed to the top of the ladder labelled "Success." In fact, I am strongly of the opinion that personality is of even greater value than beauty, either of face or figure, to a woman—and better than a handsome face and physique to a man.

Americans, I believe, call this almost indefinable quality "personal magnetism"—and the definition, I think, is about the "best possible," for so long as that magnetism is there, it seems to hide many shortcomings in acting which may exist, but which are completely overshadowed by a charming personality.

This is confirmed by what I

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have been told by people better versed in stage history than myself—that the measure of success of numbers of well-known actors and actresses in the past has been regulated to a very great extent by the amount of personal fascination they have possessed.

Again, clear enunciation is essential, for nothing is so irritating to an audience as to have to listen to actors and actresses who mumble and mouth their words in such a way that those “in front of the house” only get a sort of rough, indistinct idea of what is being said on the stage.

And last, but not least, hard work and plenty of pluck, coupled with sufficient humility to bear in

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mind that there is always something fresh to learn in acting, should ensure success in the long run, and for many "long runs" also.

By the way, some of the letters I have received from budding "Irvings" and "Terrys" - have been most amusing. The following, for example, will serve to show how curious and weird are the ideas of some aspirants to theatrical fame. Only a short time ago I received this strange communication, written by a girl from Manchester :—

'I am considered pretty, though
'some people say my figure is too
'stout, while you will see from
'the photograph which I enclose

FROM SCHOOL TO STAGE

'that I have rather a cast in my
'eyes, which, however, the doctors
'say they can cure. I feel sure
'I could play a leading part in
'a musical comedy, as I am very
'quick, and in spite of never having
'had dancing or singing lessons, I
'know I could do both in a very
'short time. At present I am
'engaged in a dressmaker's shop,
'and earn ten shillings a week,
'working eleven hours a day.
'Oh, Miss Dare, do help me to
'get an engagement, for I am so
'miserable that life does not seem
'worth living.'

When I was in "The Belle of Mayfair" I received this strange letter from a correspondent who was evidently a great admirer of

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a certain famous comedian, and who, nothing daunted by lack of experience, seemingly desired to follow in his footsteps right away, "even if only as a humble understudy":—

'I have heard' (so runs the letter) 'that a leading comedian 'in pantomime, like George Robey 'or Dan Rolyat, for example, 'earns quite a lot of money. 'Now, Miss, I wants to make 'this offer, which I hopes as "ow 'you will take as coming sport- 'ing-like. I am a waiter in a 'large West-end hotel, but ain't 'so keen on the job as not to 'wish to better myself as a 'humorous comedian. And I may 'say I sing songs sometimes,

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'which fellow-servants tell me is
'as good as a gramophone.
'Therefore, Miss, do you think
'you could get me a situation as
'understudy to Dan Rolyat, who
'is a comic, isn't he? At first
'I would accept a small celery—
'say twenty-five shillings a week
'—but if things went well I
'don't suppose the managers
'would grumble at an extra
'allowance of fifteen shillings a
'week for beer money?'

I am not an authority on the market value of beer, but from the tone of this letter I imagine my would-be comedian friend could hardly be classed quite as a teetotaller. Now, I ask you, what can I do in a case like this?

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I suppose all those who are subjected to the glare of publicity are simply bound to receive letters from people whom they do not know, and are, by the same token, never likely to know. I realise quite well, however, that these letters are almost invariably written with the best intentions, and therefore one can hardly help feeling grateful for the interest which others take in one's welfare.



CHAPTER VIII.

I Become a Sandow Girl A Curious Proposal of Marriage Superstition and the Stage

LITTLE did I think when, years ago, my sister Zena and I used to lie awake at night and build castles in the air about the wonderful parts we fondly hoped, some day, to play that I should ever figure in public as a "strong woman" or, in other words, as a "Sandow Girl." Still, as those happy-go-lucky people, who take life just as it comes and never

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seem surprised at anything, are wont to say, "one never knows what will happen in a lifetime"; so, sure enough, although, had I been a bookmaker I should have laid at least one hundred pounds to a shilling against such a chance, I have, nevertheless, actually figured as the one and only "Sandow Girl."

However, I should like to say at once that I am not really a strong woman at all, as, since I have been playing my present part, many people have, apparently, jumped to the conclusion that I have suddenly developed into a weight-lifting champion, or a lady Hercules of some kind or other.

Miss Phyllis Dare and her father



Miss Phyllis Dare and her brother



FROM SCHOOL TO STAGE

And this reminds me that, on the second night of my appearance as a Sandow Girl, I received the following offer of marriage:—

'Until to-night, although, of course, I have seen your photograph in hundreds of shop-windows, I was unaware that you were a strong woman. In 'ten days' time I leave to join an 'exploration party in West Africa, 'but as I shall be away for a 'number of years I should very 'much like to take my wife with 'me. Will you be my wife? I 'have never met another woman 'in the world I should care to 'marry, and, as you are a Sandow Girl, you should well be 'able to stand the climate on the

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'West Coast of Africa, which, as
'you may have heard, is not of
'the best. I would add that I
'am a comparatively rich man—I
'have an income of between six
'and seven thousand a year. In
'consequence, it would be un-
'necessary for you ever to have
'to return to the stage again.'

Truly—well, "truth is stranger than fiction," and the letters that actresses receive are stranger than both!

Before I lay down my pen—you don't know what hard work writing a sort of biography is to one who is not used to literary work—I should just like to try and remove the opinion which so many members of the outside

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public hold—that the life of an actress is nothing more serious than a few rehearsals and three or four hours at the theatre in the evening.

Let me, for example, just sketch out an account of what I did during the last two days before I set out on a recent tour with "The Dairymaids." The following are some of the more urgent duties I had to attend to:—

Three visits to my theatrical dressmaker; two visits to my own dressmaker; measured for theatrical shoes; measured for private footgear; six hours at Messrs. Foulsham & Banfield's, my theatrical photographers; four hours at rehearsals; business connected with

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my appearance in pantomime at Birmingham at Christmas; two visits to theatrical milliners; visit to a well-known song-writer to try over some new songs he was writing for me; an hour's practice at two new dances; signed over three hundred picture postcards, and replied personally to thirty-four letters.

Naturally, just before leaving London one has rather more than usual to attend to, but, all the same, from the time I get up in the morning until bedtime I scarcely ever seem to have a moment to myself, and I am not exaggerating when I say that I have not even had time to dine, and so, perchance, I have

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satisfied the pangs of hunger in the theatre.

And yet there are still countless numbers of people to be found who simply refuse to believe that the life of an actress is a hard one. But it is, all the same.

Perhaps, however, in the future, those who have hitherto looked down upon the theatrical profession because they have fondly imagined "it encourages idleness, and, in consequence, bad habits," will remember this short description of the many duties an actress has to attend to, for it seems rather hard luck that those who really do have to work hard should not be given the credit for that work—don't you think so?

FROM SCHOOL TO STAGE

And now just one word about the strange superstitions which many members of the theatrical profession hold. There are always people who will tell you that the days of superstition are over, but this sweeping statement cannot, I think, be applied to the theatrical profession, many of the members of which—and I do not exclude those quite at the top of the tree—are extraordinarily superstitious.

What do you think of this for a really original superstition in these times when we are told "there is nothing new under the sun"?

On the first night of a certain piece in which I was playing the

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leading part I came across a well-known member of the company literally pulling lumps out of the scenery just before the curtain was rung up for the first act.

"That's rather a destructive form of amusement, isn't it?" I said, as I saw bits of the scenery being defaced in quite a wholesale manner.

"Destructive! Not a bit of it!" replied the actor, "And I may say that I'm doing everyone in the company a good turn, for there is no surer way of making a piece a success than tearing pieces of the scenery away before the first production."

Curiously enough, the play

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actually was a tremendous success, but I think it would be most unjust to attribute this result to the scenery incident.

Again, although he has been on the stage for years, a well-known Shakespearean actor of my acquaintance even to-day always hires a hunchback to sit in his dressing room on a first night. Here also this curious method of wooing success has worked out well, either as cause or coincidence, for I think I am correct in saying that in the last few years he has only had two financial failures, which, in these days when the public are so hard to please, is decidedly a good average, isn't it?

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Do I believe in stage superstitions? Well, to quote the words of a village sage, "I do and I don't."

Before I bring these few rambling notes to an end, I would like to refer briefly to one misapprehension in particular which exists with reference to the stage—and that is the all too prevalent opinion held by a certain section of the public that a very large number of "professionals" take to the stage, not with any serious idea or hope of ever making a name for themselves, but merely because "rumour has it" that a theatrical life is always a merry one.

Now, such a view is altogether

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wrong. Although obviously on the stage, as in all other professions, a few members of both sexes may join simply with the idea of "killing time," yet—and I have the authority of one of the best-known actors of the day for this statement—actors and actresses as a whole are deadly in earnest, and whether they be "stars" or merely beginners in the chorus, are every bit as keen on reaching the top of the ladder of success as are the followers of other professions.

"She's only in the chorus, isn't fit for anything else, and is quite content to remain there," is a remark I have often heard made; and how my blood has just

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boiled at the rank injustice of it! For, believe me, there are to-day in the chorus many actors and actresses who would surely make a big name for themselves if only the opportunity came their way to show their ability.

Ah me! how important, how far-reaching in its results is that "opportunity," and how seldom it arises when it is really needed!

Would that some of those casual theatre-goers who look down upon and scornfully refuse to recognise the ability of all and sundry members of the chorus, could have seen one of the stage's "behind-the-scenes" dramas which I once witnessed when I was playing in pantomime. Had they

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been there they would never again have scoffed at the lack of ambition in those cast for "thinking parts."

I can see it so clearly now as I write that I almost fancy it occurred but yesterday. The shabbily-furnished bed-sitting room in a dingy unprepossessing street of a busy north-country town, with its time-worn almost "ashamed-of-itself" furniture, its gaily-coloured prints in cheap, gaudy gilt frames lining the walls, and its general air of "lodgings to let."

To such a room I was summoned one winter's afternoon a few days after Christmas, to see a friend of mine who had, for a few days, been in the chorus of

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the pantomime in which I was playing the title-rôle, but who could now, so the doctor in attendance told me as he met me on the stairs, only live a few more hours or days at most, through having caught a severe chill at rehearsals, which had developed into pneumonia. As I sat by the bedside of that little girl, who "was only a chorus girl," the utter "disappointment" in the whole of her stage career struck me for the first time, yet how like it was to that of thousands of others struggling to "make a name for themselves."

I recalled countless little actions which showed only too clearly with what dogged deter-

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mination she had plodded on and on in her profession, but somehow or other, luck seemed never to have come her way—not even once. Despite the fact that she had been entrusted with several quite important understudies, never on a single occasion had she been called upon to play a part. And the pathos of it! Now she was dying—and her life-long ambition to play some part, even if it were only a tiny insignificant part, was unfulfilled.

"I suppose I am not clever enough to take any sort of part," she said huskily, her eyes filling with tears, as she tossed restlessly from side to side of the bed, "but yet—and I don't mean it

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'cattily' a bit—I have sometimes felt that I might have done better than many actresses who have been chosen to play quite important parts—and now——”

“You've been unlucky, dear,” I replied, trying all I could to comfort her, “just unlucky, that's all; but bad luck must come to an end some time, and when you get well and strong I somehow feel quite sure that you will soon have a chance of doing something big.”

Her eyes lit up eagerly at my words—how she loved her profession!—and she whispered back excitedly, “Do you really think I shall, Phyllis, do you honestly think anyone, any manager, will ever want me to play a part?

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I have tried so hard to prove myself worthy of one, but oh!" and she sighed wearily, "I have got so sick of trying—and now I feel tired out."

"I promise you that when you get well you shall have a chance," I said quickly. I could not trust myself to speak, for a big lump would keep rising in my throat, and at the moment I would have promised her anything—the moon, the stars, the earth, if she had asked for them—if only that promise would have helped her a few steps on the road to recovery.

"Then after all, my hard work won't have been in vain, not altogether in vain," she said, her eyes sparkling at the mere thought

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of the realisation of the one great wish of her career—"and I have worked hard. I think, too, I really might get better perhaps if I knew for certain I was going to get a chance of showing what I could do—tell me, how do you know that I shall get that chance?"

"Because, dear," I replied softly, "I know someone who would give you the opportunity, and if that opportunity does not come immediately, I will ask Mr. —," mentioning the name of a well-known manager, "to let you play my part for once, at any rate."

There was no reply.

"Do you hear, dear?" I said, as I bent down and kissed my

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ambitious little friend on the forehead.

But she did not answer—she was dead.

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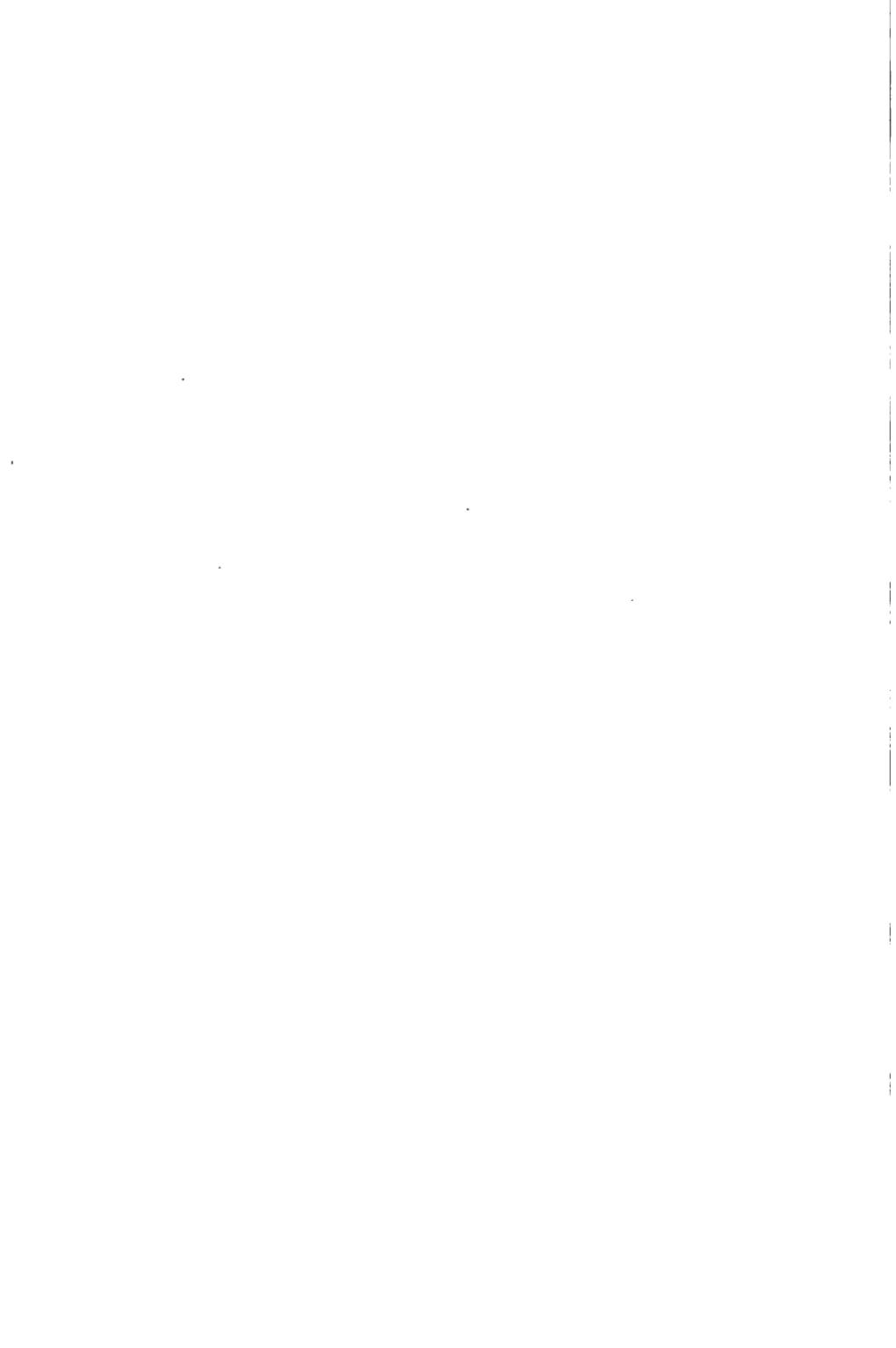
Here, at last, I think I have reached the end of my story; and I most sincerely trust that I shall be freely forgiven for the many literary sins I know I must have committed, but, truth to tell, until now I have had little experience as an authoress, and therefore I must beg leave to plead “that this is my first attempt.” So I hope my humble efforts will be judged with unusual leniency, and if, perchance, I have helped in any way at all even a single one of the thousands who are aspiring

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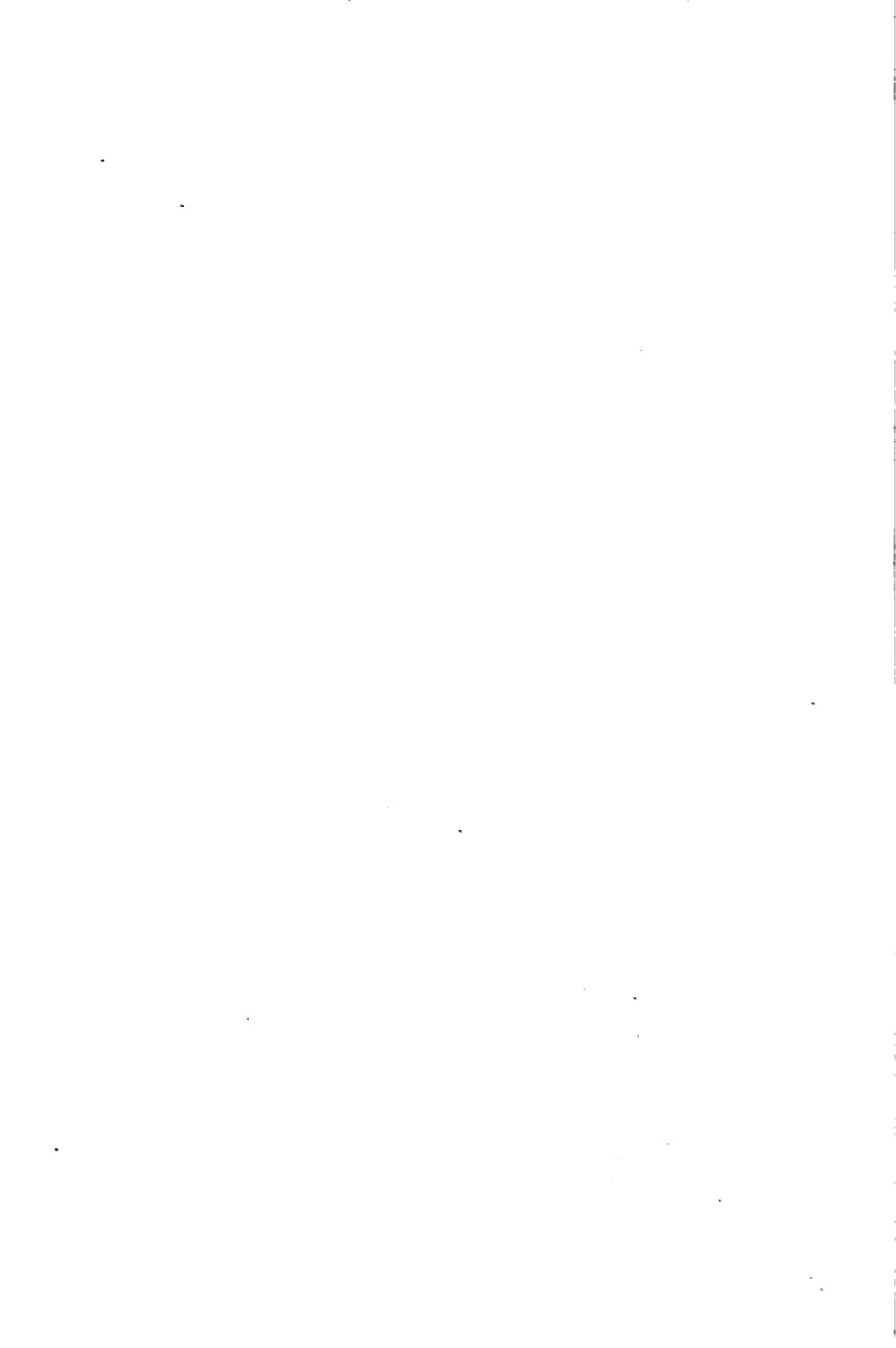
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